



**Statement of Donald Van Duyn
Deputy Assistant Director
Counterterrorism Division
Federal Bureau of Investigation
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House Homeland Security Committee
Islamic Radicalization
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Mr. Chairman Simmons, Ranking Member Lofgren and members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on the topic of Islamic radicalization in the United States. I would like to emphasize before I begin that the issue is not Islam itself but how the religious ideology is used by violent extremists to inspire and justify their actions. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) does not investigate members of any religion for their religious beliefs, but rather focuses on investigating activities that may harm the United States.

Successes in the war on terrorism and the arrests of many key al-Qa'ida leaders have diminished the ability of the group to attack the United States (US) Homeland. At the same time, a broader Sunni extremist movement has evolved from being run entirely by al-Qa'ida central to a broader movement. This is demonstrated by the 2004 Madrid bombings, the July 2005 bombings and attempted bombings in London, and recent disruptions in the US, United Kingdom, Canada, Bosnia, Denmark and elsewhere.

That said, core al-Qa'ida remains committed to attacking the United States and continues to demonstrate its ability to adapt its tactics to circumvent security measures and reconstitute its ranks. Al-Qa'ida is also attempting to broaden its appeal to English-speaking Western Muslims by disseminating violent Islamic extremist propaganda via media outlets and the Internet.

Although the most dangerous instances of radicalization have so far been overseas, the Islamic radicalization of US persons, whether foreign-born or native, is of increasing concern. Islamic radicalization in the United States does not appear to be endemic, but it does exist nationwide. Key to the success of stopping the spread of radicalization is identifying patterns and trends in the early stages.

The FBI defines homegrown Islamic extremists as US persons who appeared to have assimilated, but reject the cultural values, beliefs, and environment of the United States. They identify themselves as Muslims and on some level become radicalized in the United States. They intend to provide support for, or directly commit, a terrorist attack inside the United States. The threat from homegrown Islamic extremists is likely smaller in scale than that posed by overseas terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida but is potentially larger in psychological impact. Several recent cases illustrate the nature of the issue.

- Since August 2005 the FBI, other federal agencies, and our foreign partners have dismantled a global network of extremists who are operating independently of any known terrorist organization. Several individuals affiliated with this network were arrested for providing material support in connection with the plotting of a terrorist attack in the United States.
- The apparent increase of cases involving homegrown Islamic extremists may represent an increased sensitivity of law enforcement to activities not previously regarded as terrorism, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the homegrown phenomenon is growing.

The FBI has identified certain venues, such as prisons and the internet, that present opportunities for the proselytizing of radical Islam.

Particularly for Muslim converts, but also for those born into Islam, an extremist imam can strongly influence individual belief systems by speaking from a position of authority on religious issues. Extremist imams have the potential to influence vulnerable followers at various locations of opportunity; can spot and assess individuals who respond to their messages; and can potentially guide them into increasingly extremist circles.

Although the activities of radical imams are typically associated with Salafist-Wahhabi lectures given in the mosque, they are not limited to the mosque itself. Imams are often active and influential in other venues such as prisons, publishing, online forums, audio lectures, and at Islamic conferences and institutes. These various forums allow imams to reach new audiences and potentially susceptible followers outside of the mosque itself.

The propagation of radical ideas is not confined to Sunni Islam. Iran is committed to promoting Shia Islam activism.

The European and American experience shows that prisons are venues where extremists have radicalized and recruited among the inmate population. Prison radicalization primarily occurs through anti-US sermons provided by contract, volunteer, or staff imams, radicalized inmates who gain religious influence, and extremist media. Ideologies that radicalized inmates appear most often to embrace include the Salafi form of Sunni Islam (including revisionist versions commonly known as “prison Islam”) and an extremist view of Shia Islam similar to that of the Government of Iran and Lebanese Hizballah.

Most cases of prison radicalization appear to be carried out by domestic Islamic extremist groups with few or no direct foreign connections, like the Sunni Islamic extremist group in California, the Jam’iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS), identified in July 2005. I would like to emphasize that not all prison radicalization is Islamic in nature. Domestic groups such as white supremacists also recruit in prisons.

In response to this possible threat, the FBI and the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) have been actively engaged in efforts to detect, deter, and interdict efforts by terrorist and extremist groups to radicalize or recruit in US prisons since February 2003. As part of these efforts, we have identified “best practices” for correctional institutions to combat the spread of radicalization.

The Internet is also a venue for the radicalization of young, computer-savvy Westerners— both male and female – who identify with an Islamic extremist ideology. An older generation of supporters and sympathizers of violent Islamic extremism, in the post-9/11 environment of increased law enforcement

scrutiny, have migrated their radicalization, recruitment, and material support activities online.

Radicalization via the Internet is participatory, and individuals are actively engaged in exchanging extremist propaganda and rhetoric online which may facilitate the violent Islamic extremist cause. These online activities further their indoctrination, create links between extremists located around the world, and may serve as a springboard for future terrorist activities.

Overseas experience can also be a significant element in facilitating the transition from one who has a proclivity to be radicalized, and who may espouse radicalized rhetoric, to one who is willing and ready to act on those radicalized beliefs. Although radicalization can occur without overseas travel, the foreign experience appears to provide the networking that makes it possible for interested individuals to train for and participate in operational activity. The experience may vary from religious or language instruction to basic paramilitary training.

- We assess that the overseas experiences of John Walker Lindh¹ played a pivotal role in his involvement with the Taliban. Once overseas, he was directed by radicalized individuals to attend extremist universities, and ultimately training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The FBI approaches the radicalization issue on two levels:

- We are attempting to understand the dynamics of individual and organizational radicalization to identify early indicators as to whether individuals or groups are demonstrating the potential for violence.
- We are engaged in extensive outreach to Muslim communities to dispel misconceptions that may foster extremism.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I am happy to answer your questions.

¹ John Walker Lindh, after pleading guilty in the Eastern District of Virginia to supporting the Taliban, in violation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) (50 U.S.C. § 1705(b)), and carrying an explosive during the commission of a felony (18 U.S.C. § 844(h)(2)), was given a 20-year prison sentence.